



Daniel Ellsberg: Time to Drive Out the Bush Regime

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By Daniel Ellsberg

The man who gave the world the Pentagon Papers delivers an impassioned plea to a new generation of activists to heed the lessons of Nixon and even Hitler when taking stock of the Bush administration's nuclear ambitions.

What follows is a slightly edited version of a speech Ellsberg gave on Sept. 7 at a "World Can't Wait—Drive Out the Bush Regime" (<http://www.worldcantwait.net/>) rally in San Francisco—one of 50 meetings held that night to plan national protests in cities and towns across the country on Oct. 5.

I keep looking at that date on the calendar – Oct. 5. I think of 1969—I was copying the Pentagon Papers with Tony Russo in that month, starting Oct. 1. My intention, however, at that time was to bring them out in connection with something called the Moratorium on Oct. 15, 1969... because on that day ... across the country 2 million people marched. Not in any one place; they were counted up and added up because they all walked out, it was a weekday, out of school, out of businesses on that weekday. They met in rallies, heard many speakers—in those days there was great tolerance (well, there still is to some extent) for a lot of speeches. But it was a weekday and they called it the Moratorium because people thought the word "general strike" was too provocative, but that's what they had in mind.

It was a walkout; in other words it was not business as usual. The president was watching it in the White House, hour by hour, while pretending that he wasn't. In fact he was in the situation room getting half-hour reports on how many people. They were being counted, in Washington and New York, from a U2 [plane] above.

I see in this crowd people who are not all a lot younger than I am. How many people were in the moratorium; look around (applause). Let's see the hands. I want to ask—how old were you? Often if I ask that questions, some people will say 10 or 2. They were there with their mothers, in toddler strollers and backpacks on their parents' backs, and they were doing the same job their parents were. Being counted from the air, from reconnaissance vehicles to add up to a number of 2 million.

What they didn't know was that in fact they were stopping nuclear war. The president had made threats of nuclear war secretly several times starting in May and in August and September, saying that he was prepared to use nuclear weapons on Vietnam. They said that to the Russians and the North Vietnamese directly in Paris. And with 2 million people in the streets, he had to conclude that an ultimatum which was dated for Nov. 1—he was going to carry it out on Nov. 3rd but the date that he gave to his adversaries was Nov. 1st: "If by that time you haven't met my terms" (which they did not meet and never did meet) "we will take measures of the gravest consequence," including total bombing of North Vietnam, mining of Haiphong (which he didn't do in the end until 1972), going into Laos and Cambodia.

There were plans and target folders for the use of nuclear weapons at that point. I know somebody, Roger Morris, who actually read those target folders with photographs of the targets selected. None of us knew that. That's not why I was copying the Pentagon Papers those nights in October, or marching with my kids who were 10 and 13 at that time on Oct. 15. ... My son one night was actually copying the Pentagon Papers on a Xerox machine and I was collating them, and my daughter who was the 10-year-old was cutting "Top Secret" off the top and bottom of the pages with scissors. (Applause) That was about Oct. 5, somewhere in there, and then we all marched on Oct. 15. But we weren't doing that because we knew that nuclear war was imminent; we just knew the war was going on unacceptably, that the country had to change course. There was no clue that we were on the verge of massive escalation.

Now I'll give you something from 1969 that has come out now—37 years later. Look at National Security Archives—I think it is at nsarchive.com. Look at one of their latest releases, on documents finally declassified last November, now published for the first time on, I think, July 1-- their latest release on Nixon's nuclear alert of 1969. This was first found out by Seymour Hersh, mainly with anonymous sources some years ago, but nobody believed him. And now the documents have become available that on Oct. 13, 1969—two days before the scheduled Moratorium—SAC, Strategic Air Command planes went on an unprecedented secret alert around the world, the intention of which was to show the Russians by their electronic means and their radar and their surveillance that the U.S. was on a nuclear alert—but not let the American people know. They actually dispersed planes with nuclear bombs aboard to airports like Boston airport, Los Angeles, and elsewhere as they might do on the eve of a nuclear war. They weren't planning a first strike against the Soviet Union, although the Soviets were made to worry about that. This was meant to show the Soviets, who Nixon had threatened that we would use nuclear weapons against North Vietnam. And there was of course the possibility that the Russian nuclear weapons might be used in response. This alert was to let them know, don't even think of it. Not because they would have worried about the Soviets really doing that, but to make it as clear as possible "we're going to do this and we're prepared for anything"—to make the threat as strong as possible.

By the way, if you look at nsarchive, the people who wrote that up—it's a good account by Burr and Kimball—in my opinion they make a mistake.... They are under the belief that Nixon had turned off his plans for the escalation just before that alert went on. That's mistaken; they don't have a clear reference for that and I believe they are wrong. They think this was simply bluffing. Part of the bluff, by the way, was to put planes in the air on airborne alert with nuclear bombs aboard for the first time in over a year. (The airborne nuclear alert had been discontinued in early 1968, when one of those planes crashed, releasing a couple of its bombs in Newfoundland, I think that was, one of which has never been found. They went into the water ... it didn't go off as a nuclear explosion, but they released radioactive material.

So, the reason [the airborne nuclear alert] had been stopped was because it was dangerous. On another occasion which I remember very well—I was in the Pentagon actually-- two planes bumped into each other with these bombs and four bombs were released. So they were doing something with a genuine risk to make this threat plausible. But in those days, it didn't pay to tell the American people you were making nuclear threats, because the American people would have felt less confident than Nixon that the Soviets would not respond. They would have worried. They would have been very worried and very nervous. And you would have seen the kind of reaction you did get when Ronald Reagan seemed lighthearted about nuclear war in 1981. The reaction to that was 1 million people in Central Park protesting Reagan's nuclear policy at that point. So in those days you had to keep the threats secret. What's changed is that people no longer do worry that Russia will respond to a nuclear weapon going off somewhere. They'll sit tight. We aren't just number one, we're the only one now....

Historical analogy here: The fact is that when people did march in October and November 1969—without even realizing that a crisis was imminent, they just saw the war was going on—they in fact stopped a massive escalation of the war. Which did take part sequentially— Laos, Cambodia, Haiphong—over the years, but the nuclear part, no. Even though Nixon was still discussing that on April 25, 1972—three years later. I've heard this on the tape. Nixon says, "I still think we ought to take the dikes out now. Will that drown people?" Kissinger tells him, "About two hundred thousand people." And the president reflects, "No, no, no ... I'd rather use the nuclear bomb. Have you got that, Henry?" And Kissinger, the great Nobel Prize winner, earns his Nobel Prize on this one afternoon by saying, "That, I think, would be just too much." And Nixon says—he sounds a little surprised, and disappointed—"The nuclear bomb, does that bother you? I just want you to think big, Henry, for Chrissakes."

We are in a crisis right now. It's known to us, more than it was known to almost anyone outside the White House in 1969. A genuine crisis. We are looking at a very high likelihood, I believe, as I read the Seymour Hersh articles about a new war, a new attack on Iran which could involve nuclear weapons— it has been explicitly described as having the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons. The president, Rice, Rumsfeld—they have all been asked specifically: Do we rule out nuclear weapons? They answer, "All options are on the table, nothing is ruled out." And Hersh reveals that plans have been made for the use of nuclear weapons. This would be a new war in addition then to Iraq, quite possibly much, much worse than Iraq in all of its consequences.

This is too crazy to imagine with any other administration. If Hersh were giving those stories about some other administration, whether it's George Bush Sr. or Gore or whoever it might be, I would say "impossible." The costs of this are too obvious, too horrific, they couldn't really mean that. You can't say that about this administration, [though] many people do. The ones who say that it's too crazy even for these guys I think they are on the wrong foot. It's not too crazy for

these guys. The people who did get us into Iraq are—according to Hersh—on the same kind of “reasoning,” prepared to do that to Iran.

But, that’s not all that’s abroad. The Boston Globe editorial on Aug. 31, which criticizes the World Can’t Wait, along with criticizing Rumsfeld in the same terms, links them together—saying that both of them engage in hyperbole and in fact the same hyperbole. Actually Rumsfeld has a quote here that, taken by itself, is the first sentence that I can remember that I agreed with by Donald Rumsfeld. He said that “before America entered WWII was a time when those who warned of a coming crisis—the rise of fascism and Nazism—were ridiculed and ignored.”

That’s now, that’s us he’s talking about—I would say. We are warning about a coming crisis, and the crisis I’m warning about is Hitler-like aggression such as we’ve already seen from this administration. The attack on Iraq is legally indistinguishable from Hitler’s attack on Poland or France or Norway or Russia. Same aggression—pure crime against the peace—for which people were hanged back in Nuremberg. Critics of the Iraq war, says Rumsfeld, “seem not to have learned history’s lessons.” Well, I would take the “not” out of that. It’s only the critics of the Iraq war who seemed to have learned history’s lessons.

We do face a crisis. To do as the Boston Globe editorial does in criticizing World Can’t Wait for analogizing Hitler’s regime to the present, is, I would say, very mistaken—[the Globe] is very mistaken in dismissing that. Look at the aggression that has already happened and is looming again. Holocaust—this is not planned in terms of gas chambers. But nuclear weapons will bring the gas chambers to the people. Every nuclear weapon is a portable Auschwitz. The first one that is used may kill only hundreds, depending on where they are used, which would be extremely ominous. People would say, “Ah, they can be used easily.” The use of nuclear weapons even in a deserted field against an underground site by this country would bring us into a new era of history—the consequences of which would so dwarf the Holocaust there would be simply no comparison. The nuclear wars in our future—that would be started by an act now being planned by this country—are Hitler-like to the hundredth degree.

But in terms of the domestic situation, of course this country is not Germany in 1938 or 1939. It’s not Germany in 1934. Let me be very specific. It’s not the Germany of July 1933 under Hitler, who had become chancellor as a minority candidate. They were the largest party, but a minority—36% of the vote in January 1933. But by July there was a one-party state; nearly every leader of the social democrats, which had by then been banned, had been jailed or put in a camp. They hadn’t put many Jews in camps yet. The first people put in camps were labor union leaders, especially social democrats and communists in 1933. Thousands, even tens of thousands, had been killed and put in camps by that time. Six months afterwards, Hitler was in power.... I’ll be very specific. Hitler was a fascist, a term that came out of Mussolini really, but Hitler was a proud fascist and his party was a fascist party, a minority—although it came to be a large party during the Depression in December 1932 and January 1933 when he became chancellor. Hitler was a fascist, and signaled what he wanted to do pretty clearly.

But Germany was not a fascist state in January 1933 under Hitler. He had only two ministers in the cabinet. He had Goering—who became his number two man later and was, I believe, minister of the interior in charge of the police in Prussia, the key state in Germany. Hitler had two ministers in the cabinet; it was not a fascist cabinet and it wasn’t a fascist state. It was a fascist state two months later. In between was the Reichstag fire on Feb. 27, which Goering and Hitler blamed on the communists. Whoever did it—and it may have been the Nazis—it was not the communists. That is clear. There is no historical controversy about that, but it was totally blamed on the communists. And that night the Communist Party leaders were imprisoned, scattered, killed—many, many killed, thousands killed—along with the social democrats, who were still for the moment legal.

The next day the Reichstag fire decree was signed by Hindenburg, which explicitly suspended all provisions of the constitution providing for freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press. It was a social democratic constitution. One other thing the decree ended was the privacy of the postal system and telecommunications. Very interesting—this ended here four years ago, it turns out, but we didn’t know that. We haven’t had the full—despite the Patriot Act, despite other things that have come along—we haven’t had the Reichstag fire decree yet, which was followed by an election in which Hitler banned the Communist Party, banned demonstrations, banned any public meetings by the social democrats. And even so, he could only get 42% of the vote. It’s the highest he ever got in an election. But weeks after that he had an enabling act which gave him power to rule without benefit of the Reichstag. He became a dictator by constitutional act, by vote, everything constitutional up till that time. Over the period of the next month, the other parties were banned, the camps were set up. It was too late for mass resistance. The social democrats could have pulled off a

general strike up until the Reichstag fire. After that it was too late.

The situation now, I think, demands of us not business as usual; it demands what was available in this country in 1969. I'll characterize that very briefly: 5,000 young people went to prison rather than go into the Army (under the draft)—rather than collaborate with the war. I met some of those people on their way to prison. They put in my mind the thought: They're doing everything they can, nonviolently—they were followers of Martin Luther King, of Thoreau, of Gandhi. Truthfully and nonviolently they are changing their lives, they are giving up their future, their career, they are doing everything they can to avert this war. That's the right thing to do. What can I do now, what can I do if I'm ready to go to prison? Among other things, I started copying the Pentagon Papers—which did confront me with a possible prison sentence of 115 years—at that point. Was that too much to take on?

I'd been in Vietnam; I'd seen people in combat there. Maybe people here have had that experience. In combat it's very common to see people risking their lives—giving their lives, giving their bodies, becoming paraplegic like my friend Ron Kovic—for a lie. Bravery and a bad cause are not uncommon—you see it on both sides. Very often, both sides are bad causes, in fact. Doesn't take a good cause for people in combat to risk their lives for the other people in the squad and for what they have been told is a good cause.

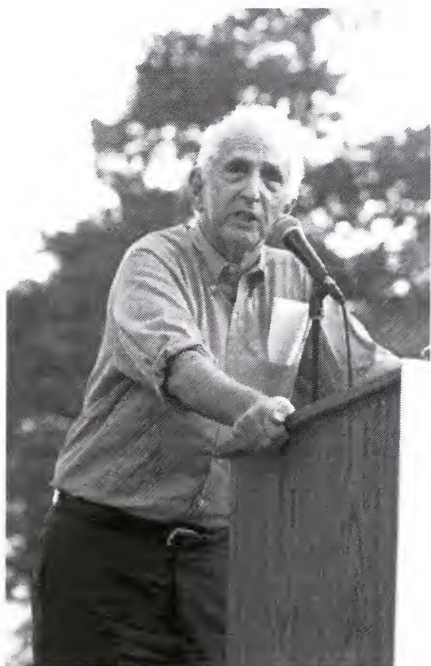
What's needed at home of course is people who will change their lives and risk their careers and their jobs and their relationships with their families, their bosses, with their church groups, whoever—by taking a stronger stand than those people are ready to take. And by saying truths that those people don't want to hear. Without that courage, policies like this can't be changed. With it, they may not be changed, we may fail. But, without that kind of courage and that mass mobilization, there is no chance.

When the time came to distribute the Pentagon Papers, the FBI was searching for me and my wife. For 13 days we were underground, working with a bunch of students mainly, many of whom I'd never met. I knew one person and she knew other people. I didn't know the other people. And each one of those people was asked—not by me, by some of the others—“we are doing an action that may be very useful. It might shorten the war, but it could be very dangerous legally. Put you in great jeopardy. Are you willing to help?” We couldn't broadcast what it was beforehand. Not one person said no. That was a time when all you had to do ... in those days you could tell who you could count on, except for a handful of informers. You went to someone with long hair, or young. That's all it took. And we said, “Will you help end the war, [even though] it may put you in prison?” “Yes.” And we went from house to house. The FBI was searching for us, people gave us their rooms. People distributed those papers, everybody did. During that time, 19 newspapers published the Pentagon Papers. Not just The New York Times and the New York Post, who were enjoined, but the St. Louis Post Dispatch, also enjoined for the first time in our history. The Boston Globe enjoined.

There had never been an injunction against a newspaper before. In the face of the president and the attorney general saying every word being published here endangers American lives, endangers our troops in the field, endangers national security—that's what the president was saying. And every one of those newspapers that had the chance, everyone—nobody turned it down. They looked at it, they read it for themselves. “It doesn't look that way to us, that's not our judgment of the national security, and we don't agree with the president.” So, they all did it. (Applause).

It was a wave of civil disobedience by corporations, profit-making corporations—newspapers that had more of a sense of being a newspaper than is common today. They weren't owned by conglomerates the way they are so much now. It was a wave of civil disobedience across the country.

I remember two years after the Moratorium, the war was still going on. This war may last a long time but it will not ever be ended without people acting in the spirit of 1969 and 1968 and 1965. So thank you for being here. (Applause).



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